

Key Role Of Families In Shaping The Life Trajectories And School Success Of Students: And The Public Shared Reciprocal Responsibilities

Ajuoga Milcah Aoko

St. Paul's University and Mbugua Cleopas Munyua,
Daystar University

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to interpret aspects of family involvement in education for transformation in relation to student's achievement both academically and socially and suggest how the use of family involvement principles, and relevant experiences in other educational areas could benefit society for transformation. An analysis based on a literature review of relevant educational endeavors' in family involvement in students learning was used. This paper suggests that most teaching and learning in the institutions of learning focus on in- school – activities rather than on out-of –school activities. Some institutions of learning, however, have effectively pursued involvement of families in their programmes. Key issues for consideration include causes of poor performance, parenting role, principles about family engagement, examination of some research findings about family engagement, challenges and suggested solutions to family involvement in student achievement and the public shared reciprocal responsibilities. Educators for transformation could use this relevant eclectic underpinning and experience gained in other areas of education to address the impact of their own family involvement programme activities. Educators have traditionally been reluctant to pursue family involvement in education programme but such programmes aids in students achievement. This paper will also help educators to reflect on how the engagement of family accords with the liberal traditions of education.

Keywords: Family, parent, involvement, engagement, transformation, achievement and students success.

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning is complex, it begins at birth and continues throughout life. Parents are the first teachers and role models for their children, and therefore have a strong influence on their learning. Yet studies continue to show that many parents are not aware of the importance they play in their child's education and have a limited understanding of their role in their children's learning (Benci, 2011).

One of the most powerful but neglected supports for children's learning and development is family involvement both in and out of school. According to Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall and Gordon (2009), they purport that over 40 years of steadily accumulating evidence show that family involvement is one of the strongest predictors of children's school success, and that families play vital roles in their

children's cognitive, social and emotional development from birth through adolescence. However, resources for and commitments to promoting meaningful family involvement have been few, weak, and inconsistent. To reframe public understanding of the benefits of family involvement in children's education, this paper lays a more equitable approach to family involvement and approach to family involvement and positions it as a key cross – cutting component of broader comprehensive or complimentary learning systems in which families, schools, after school programmes and others have a shared responsibility for children's learning. Families involvement in their children's learning directly and positively affect educational outcomes and this is a concern world over. For example to meet the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, in the USA, schools became required to address family involvement

in substantial ways (Winsconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). However, it is widely recognized that given the constraints of limited time, funding, staffing and resources, involving parents in their children's education in ways that are effective and meaningful remains a challenge to schools.

Meaningful and effective involvement includes not just parents, caregivers, and teachers behaviours, practices attitudes, and involvement with the institutions where children learn, but also these institutions expectations, outreach, partnership and interactions with families. Therefore families, schools, and communities must together construct family involvement, actively taking part and sharing responsibility in building mutual responsibility in building mutual respectful relationships and partnerships. Beginning with a brief overview of conceptions of family roles and responsibilities in children's learning, this paper next offers a review of recent research on the ways in which expectations and support for family involvement have shifted, particularly with respect to economically disadvantaged and marginalized families.

II. SUMMARISED RESEARCH FINDINGS ON STUDENTS ACHIEVEMENT WITH FAMILIES ENGAGEMENT

Many studies found that students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, were more likely to earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher – level programmes, be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behaviour, and adapt well to school, and graduate and go on to post secondary education (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). Studies found that programmes and special efforts to engage families make a difference. For example teacher outreach to parents was related to strong and consistent gains in student performance in both reading and mathematics.

The effective outreach practice included meeting face – to – face, sending materials home, and keeping in touch about progress. Workshops for parents on helping their children at home were linked to higher reading and math scores. Schools that succeed in engaging families from very diverse backgrounds share three key practices; focus on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families and community members. Recognize, respect, and address families needs, as well as class and cultural differences (Bogenschneider, et., al., 2004).

Impact of parent and community organizing on improving schools. This type of engagement is based outside schools and led by parents and community members. Strategies of community organizing are different from traditional parent involvement and are openly focused on building low –income families and political skills to hold schools accountable for results

Anew group of studies found that community organizing contributed to these changes in schools: upgraded school facilities, improved school leadership and staffing, higher quality learning programmes for students, new resources and programmes to improve teaching and curriculum and funding for after school programmes and family supports (Smith, Kuzin, Pedro and Wohlesletter, 2004). Families and parents

are critical to children's attainment. Parental involvement in their child's literacy practices positively affects children's academic performances and is a more powerful force for academic success than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education.

The home is crucial; parents have the greatest influence on the achievement of young people through supporting their activities in school. Another finding is that early intervention is vital. The earlier parents become involved in their children's literary practices, the more profound the results and the longer – lasting the effects. Children learn long before they enter formal education. Therefore, any policy aiming to improve literacy standards cannot be limited to formal educational settings, where children spend only a small portion of their time. On the contrary, it needs to embrace the family as a whole and include parents as partners in their children's education from the very beginning of their children's lives. It should aim to raise parent's awareness of the differences they can make and set up systems that offer constant encouragement and support according to individual requirements and needs.

III. CAUSES OF POOR PERFORMANCE

Policy makers interested in promoting school success must look beyond the school perimeters. In many occasions school reform focuses on course curriculum, instructional methods, and teacher training but these reforms accomplish very little, because academic achievement is shaped more by children's life outside the school walls, particularly their parents, peers, and how they spend out – of – school time. Policy makers interested in ensuring a good education for all children must look beyond the school door. According to Bogenschneider and Johnson (2004) when parents are involve, students get better grades, score higher on standardized tests, have better attendance records, drop out less often, have higher aspirations, and more positive attitudes toward school and homework. Steinberg (1996) assembles an impressive body of evidence indicating that the problem of poor academic achievement is genuine, substantial, and pervasive across ethnic, socio economic, age groups (p.184). Young stars success in school affects how they do later in life and, is the surest ways to move families out of poverty.

Looking at the causes of poor performance, one of the most significant problems that must addressed is the high prevalence of disadvantaged parents. Lack of interest on the part of parents is associated with academic difficulties and low school achievement. Steinberg asserts that “only one fifth of parents consistently attend school programmes. Nearly one – third of students say their parents have no idea how they are doing in school. About one – sixth of all students report that their parents don't care whether they earn good grades in school or not (p.187).

School failure is also associated with a peer culture that down plays academic success. Another factor the students beliefs about causes of school success and failure, young people's successive time spent in after school activities,

teaching practices that do not engage students and encourage critical thinking, low quality child care, too few school – sponsored extracurricular activities, and lack of programmes for out – of – school time. A consistent body of research concludes that parents are the first and foremost influence on their children’s development and school success.

IV. PARENTS ROLE IN THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE STUDENTS ACHIEVEMENT

All parents say that they value education for their children. According to Epstein (1985) parents need to be involved in school decisions as knowledgeable partners. They need to know how the school system works, what programme and activities are available, how these decisions will affect their children’s chances for future success, which courses are needed to prepare for future jobs and careers, what teachers expecting their courses for students to do well, and in what ways parents can get involved in decision that affect how schools operate. Parents are also involved at home by ensuring that their children attend school, providing a variety of reading materials and learning opportunities, and limiting excessive television viewing. Also by conveying to the children high expectations that they will do well in school.

Young people need safe places in non –school hours, a number of out – of – school programmes provide educational learning experiences for school children in supervised settings. In a recent study of 25 programmes by Harvard Family Research Project, these out – of-school time programmes were linked to better performance in school, more positive attitudes toward school, higher educational aspirations, and improved school attendance. Moreover, youth in supervised programmes were less involved in risky behaviours, more involved in their communities, had better social and communication skills and more self confident (Harvard Family Research Project, 2003).

In rapidly changing society with schools that differ substantially from those at the turn of the century, one fundamental thing about student and the family has not changed very much at all, the central role that families play in the academic achievement of their children. Families continue to retain prime authority and responsibility for their children’s education in legal order, moral authority, and social thought. To date Kenya through the dispensation of the new constitution has taken a number of actions to promote family school involvement, but to date there is no comprehensive, well funded vision for family involvement. The legislation passed a number of laws to support other ways of involving families in education such as; requiring parents to take their children to school, every person has the right to education, granting free and compulsory basic education, access relevant education and training, granting workers the right to use arranged time to attend school functions such as Parents teachers associations, parent teachers conference each year, providing supplement funds for high poverty districts and ASAL areas, and providing food (Republic of Kenya, 2010).

Research on the role of family involvement in students achievement established that students whose families are actively involved demonstrate increased educational gains; they achieve higher grades, have better attendance, complete

more homework, are better motivated, and are less likely to be cited for disciplinary action. Winsconsin Department of Public (2005) purports further that students of involved families are more prepared for learning, are more likely to stay in school, and to attend post- secondary instruction at higher rates. Students are not the only ones to experience the advantages of family involvement. Educators’ also accrue benefits when family involvement is strong. School staff gains important allies as parents come to understand more about their schools and teaching and learning in general. As interaction between school staff and family members increases, schools become more aware of ways they can build on family strengths to support children’s success. Schools with strong family involvement also experience fewer complaints from families about homework or the curriculum.

The academic encouragement parents provide to their adolescence is even more powerful than the support provided by friends (Sands and Plunkett, 2005). Parenting style should be taken into account. includes how parents use discipline and control and are also associated with adjustment and achievement. Many studies suggest that an authoritative style, which is responsive, warm, and firm but democratic is associate with more positive outcomes than other styles. However, recent research shows that parenting styles and their effects differ among ethnic and demographic groups due to cultural traditions and norms and contextual factors (Mandara, 2006). For example, strict limit – setting may be more adoptive for families who live in high – crime neighbourhoods and so on.

Monitoring of social activities decreases school problems, substance use and delinquency, and promotes social competence and good grades (Rodrigues, 2002). By monitoring adolescents academic and social lives, parents can catch emerging problems and promote positive academic outcomes (Catsambis, 200, Sartor & Youniss, 2002). Examining parent – youth relationships, adolescents do better in school when their parents are emotionally warm and responsive to their needs (Lippman and Garret, 2004). Similarly, adolescents who share trusting relationships with their parents – characterized by mutual and sustained bonds and open communication have higher GPAs and more likely to stay out of trouble (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyckx, & Goosens, 2006).

V. CHALLENGES TO FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Despite strong evidence that involvement has significant benefits, many barriers to involvement exist for both the school and families. Teachers often lack the time and opportunities to work on family involvement staff misconceptions of families’ abilities create barriers to strong family involvement. In some schools, staff may feel that parents with limited educational backgrounds are unable to promote their children’s schooling. Research solidly disputes this belief; many low incomes, poorly educated families support learning by frequently talking with their children about school, carefully monitoring the belief that education is important.

Many families do not feel welcome in schools, especially those who speak a language other than English. Other parents have had bad experiences in school and feel unsure about the value of their contribution's another barrier can be a mismatch between the home and the school environments can often hinder family involvement. Finally some families lack resources, especially time, to be more actively involved.

According to Smith et al.(2004) they further point at lack of time, economic constraints , lack of transportation ,lack of childcare and language as a potential barriers. Other barriers include, conflicting work schedules. Reminders of parents own negative school experiences and anxiety about child's performance can be another factor.

VI. FAMILY INVOLVEMENT PRINCIPLES

According to Smith, Kuzin, Pedro and Wohlsletter (2004) the first step in fostering family engagement is understanding that the school can have a major positive impact on participation. For example Minesota New County School starts every school year with individual student – family conferences to plan for the upcoming year, to learn more about the student and family, and to insure that the very first contact between home and school is a positive one. This principle helps both parent an the child to be prepared.

The use of technology is vital. To save on the cost of distributing newsletters or flyers, many schools send e-mail updates to families for updated information. In addition to communicating via e-mail, some schools may advertise family engagement opportunities on the schools website and track family online.

VII. SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS TO FAMILY INVOLVEMENT CHALLENGES

The schools to build collaborative relationships with parents by recognizing that all parents, regardless of income, education level, or cultural background are involved in their children's learning and what their children to do well in school. By enhancing education through technology by using technology to promote parent involvement and increase school communication and the process must include efforts to regularly inform parents about technology used in the educational programme; create programmes that will support families to guide their children's from pre – school through higher education , develop the capacity of school staff to work with families and community members, focus efforts to engage families and community members in developing trusting and respectful relationships, make sure that parents, school staff and community members understand that the responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise and conduct research that is more rigorous and focused, and that uses more cultural sensitive and empowering definitions of parent involvement (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2005). Another solution is to use the available resources of universities, or other institutions of higher education to assist in the design, implementation and evaluation of local programmes.

With regard to lack of time, the school should plan events around parents' schedules and also partner with organizations that provide services to parents such as churches and offer programmes jointly. In order to tackle communication barrier, communication with parents through multiple methods such as print, phone calls, community radio programmes and so on. To address the problem of conflicting work schedules, the school to survey parents scheduling needs and plan events around their work schedules and also offer home visits. For the parents who are stigmatized by negative school experiences, the school should encourage office staff to respond warmly to phone calls and school visitors and also communicate with families about their children's successes at school, not solely when child is in trouble or not doing well. Finally anxiety about the child's performance provision should be made for opportunities for families and school staff to interact informally. Legislatures to pass law to promote family involvement in education for instance the Ministry of Education, local school boards and school to select parent advocates who help increase parent involvement, hear parents' complaints and facilitate communication between schools and families.

With the devolved governments it would be in order for the county governments across to pass a number of laws to support other ways of involving families in education such as requiring businesses to allow their employees time off to participate in their children's schooling, parent involvement for teacher certification, other areas to include parent outreach activities and requiring school school report forms to include progress on parent involvement.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Family involvement is necessary, but not sufficient. To be successful in school and in life, children must have access to multiple supports, including enriching early childhood experience, effective schools out – of – school time programmes and nurturing families. Emerging research has shown that these supports can be more effective when they are intentionally connected to each other. Supporting more involvement at school from all parents may be an important strategy for addressing the achievement gap. When parents talk to their children about school, expect them to do well, help them plan for college, and make sure that out – of – school activities are constructive, their children can do better in school. When schools engage families in ways that are linked to improving learning, students make better gains. When families and communities organize to hold poorly performing schools accountable, studies suggest that school districts make positive changes in policy, practice, and resources (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). It is important to note that in Kenya in order to improve student achievement, the Ministry of Education have focused on course curriculum, instructional methods, and teacher training. Policy makers interested in promoting school success must look beyond the school door. Family, school, and community partner ships are one way that policy makers can build family involvement.

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